

ALEX GARDENER



HOW TO GROW THE TOP MEDICINAL PLANTS
AND THEIR USES AND BENEFITS

DIY HERBAL GARDENING



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How To Grow The Top Medicinal Plants And Their Uses And Benefits

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Are you tired of waiting for the seasons to change before you can savor the taste of fresh herbs and spices? Then the suggestion of growing an indoor herb garden is perfect! It's a win-win situation for sure!

The best part of it is—you don't need to know a thing about herbal gardens. Even if you have a black thumb and have killed off every plant you've ever owned—you'll find herbs far easier. You'll save money too. Herbs are some of the most expensive produce you'll buy at the grocery store.

Let's get you started at having an herb garden whatever the weather! We will cover steps to growing an outdoor herb garden as well as an indoor garden in case you live in a palpable climate for them.

The Top Herbs

Chives, Mint, Oregano, Thyme and Rosemary are the most common used in cookery and they just so happen to be the best kinds to grow indoors. Like baked potatoes in the winter?

Then fresh chives are just a snip away. If you're a spaghetti sauce lover then imagine what transformation fresh oregano would make?

Getting the Herb Garden Started

The Basics

Most herbs grow great in pots. The aforementioned five favorites are just that kind. However; if you live in a warmer climate with full sun at least 4 hours a day, then consider a patio or outdoor patch as well.

Some herbs love to spread out and some grow like trees. The spray can reach 6-8 inches and a 4 foot circumference so outdoors may be best for some. Alternatively—you may want to grow them in giant tree pots which also work if you have a sunny enclosed patio. Herb gardens are fun and versatile.

Four Components for a Successful Herb Garden

1. Lots of Sunshine
2. Good Potting Soil that Drains Sufficiently
3. Herb Appropriate Fertilizer
4. Appropriate Watering

An equally important element is positioning them for optimal effect. Herbs enjoy and thrive in sunny areas as long as they are never exposed to temperatures of more than 90 degrees.

But, there is a science to that which is very simple. Place them in an area that receives sun 4 hours and shade for the rest of the day. An easy way to ensure they are where they need to be is to check them every four hours in each spot.

For example from 8am until noon, then the next four hours and so on. It may actually take a little experimentation to get it right. If you really intend to have a fully indoor herb garden—you may have to do it in a sun room or indoor patio to get full sun in a spot that will shade itself in the afternoon or just simply move them to a shadier area.

Once you've gotten this down, you're good to go.

Planting Your Herbs

Planting is easy. Here there are some guidelines for successful planting.

Plant Area

Needs to be between 1-4 feet. This depends solely on the plant itself and what they like.

Plant Type

- Sage, Rosemary, Mint, Oregano and Marjoram like a good 4 foot range and no less than 3 feet.
- Savory, Basil Thyme, Tarragon like a 2 foot range.
- Cilantro, parsley, Chives and dill like a 1 foot range.

Preparing Soil

Now, the soil has to be treated much the same way whether it is indoor or outdoor. It just gets done on a smaller or larger scale depending on whether it's in pots indoors or outdoors in the ground.

- Make sure you are turning the soil and aerate it. You can use a gardening fork or a hand aerator you can find in a gardening DIY

shop. This creates room in the soil so the nutrients can be picked up by the roots and flourish the plant. It also allows the water to drain which is extremely important for herb gardens.

- It is strongly suggested you put fertilizer which is appropriate for your herbs about one inch over the top and then incorporate it into the soil. This will take care of any drainage issues.

Planting The Garden

Find the most healthy and strong plants available

You'll want to give them a fighting chance through the possible root shock from replanting etc. It is a bit traumatizing to them to do this so you'll want to have a hardy plant to start with.

Watering is essential in the right amount and at the right time

Herbs can suffer from over watering just as much as under watering. If you over water you are lending an opportunity for root rot and diseases and growth issues. If you are under watering they will die of malnutrition and other aspects. So, the watering instructions are very simple.

Test Soil

Test the soil 1 inch deep below the surface for dryness. This tells you that it is appropriate to water. As long as it's wet at that 1 inch below the surface you have watered appropriately.

Timing the Watering

This is actually dependent on the climate you live in. If you live with humidity or in a particularly arid climate then the water will evaporate more

readily.

This may take a while to figure out. The best thing you can do is to check it throughout the day for a while to get a good handle on when and how much you need to water.

The Harvest!

This is the best time of all! You get to plan exciting recipes for use everyday!

Cut your Herbs

Cutting herbs for use is like pruning a tree or a shrub. You don't just cut away! And leave the plant to fend for itself. You must cut 1/3 rd of the leaves as close to the intersection of the leaf as possible after the plant has reached 6-8 inches tall.

This way, they will regrow fast and you don't have to wait very long to use it again as well as having a nice healthy flourishing plant all year.

Plant Growth Differences

Different plants grow new leaves in different places. Some, will grow new leaves from the middle and some will grow from the outer edge. Once you watch your plants grow you'll get to see what their habits are.

Container Planting Herbs

As we said, we would cover container planting as well as ground planting for those that are die-hard indoor herb gardeners. This is a much easier way of planting that will save time and energy in digging holes in the ground.

The Difference Between Ground and Container Gardening:

The main difference is that plants just like being in the ground, after-all it's their natural state and they like to spread their roots out. Container plants need a bit more attention to watering and fertilization than their ground partners outside. But, it's easy and quite therapeutic.

Tools for Container Potting

1. 8-18 inch pots that can be plastic or clay. We suggest plastic which won't add to the weight if you're moving them about frequently. You also may want to do a little research on the plant you've got and combine the ones that require the same watering routine into one big pot.
2. Hose or an accessible watering container is essential.
3. Fertilizer as well. We suggest a vegetable or organic one.

You will want to allow 8 inches between plants and be aware that you may also want to transplant them one by one to bigger pots as some may outgrow the pots they're in.

Steps for Container Potting

Prepare the Soil in the Container:

Fill the container with the potting soil and add the fertilization material in the amount according to package instructions. Then, water the soil making sure it is wet uniformly.

You can insure this by turning it and mixing it with a gardening fork or spade. Protect the surface underneath the container by placing a saucer or a dish or maybe some tin foil.

Dig the Holes, Transplant and Water:

Now, dig the number of holes uniformly for each plant. Take hold of the plant and turn upside down. Gently tap the base of the container to help loosen them.

Next, gently hold the base of the plant at the intersection of the plant and soil and pull GENTLY until the plant comes out. Tap the roots a bit to get the old excess dirt off them and place in the hole.

Press the soil in around the plant base. Water them until uniformly wet after you have repeated the process for all plants. Only water them again when they feel dry.

Sunning and Cutting:

Cut 1/3rd of the branches at the leaf intersection when the plant reaches 6-8 inches tall. Check for where new leaves are—either in the outer edges or the middle and cut accordingly.

Also, make sure they have 4 hours sun and less sun to full shade in the afternoon. They will still grow in less sun but they won't mature well.

Your Complete Guide To Growing, Harvesting And Using The Top Herbs

Here we will hold your hand through growing not only the best but the most common herbs used in cookery. We'll even suggest how you can use them so the sky's the limit!

A Growing Guide To Basil

Overview

Basil is an annual that reaches approximately 1-2 feet in height. It boasts leaves that are one opposite the other on either side of the stalk which have a glossy texture.

The plant will yield little spikes of white flowers. Basil can possess a variety of tastes such as licorice, cinnamon, lime, lemon and clove! But, they will never overpower. If you like color as well you can get the “*Opal*” or “*Rubin*”.

These are a purple leaved varieties. Whichever ones you end up with you can rest assured you have the royalty of the herb garden. They are THE most popular of all herbs—lending flavor to spaghetti sauces, pesto, salads and more!

How to Grow:

1. **Temperature Outdoors:** The first point about basil is that it's a tropical plant It loves the warmth and hates the cold soil. So, the best time to plant outdoors is after the frost and winter are over and the ground soil is warm.

2. **Temperature Indoors:** If you are growing indoors, then heating cables may be used to make sure the soil stays warm.

3. **Sun, Fertilizer and Spacing:** Again, make sure the plants are in full sun. Make sure you are using a soil that is well-drained and very compost enriched and you can also add manure that has been aged. Anything organic is good just make sure you are following instructions.

- Space large leaved varieties like '*Lettuce Leaf*' about 1 1/2 feet apart.
- Space small leaved varieties to 'Spicy Globe' about 1 foot apart.

To make sure you have them all year long if you live in a colder climate—you can put a few plants in containers and raise them indoors. You can safely bring them in prior to the frost of fall.

You can clip off some shoots off the ends and pot them in water so you can bring them in later as well as maybe make a June sowing and have them in winter.

Preventing Diseases

The type of diseases that basil is susceptible to are mold, black spot and a variety of fungus. They are also in danger as seedlings from damping-off. Japanese beetles love to make little skeletons out of your leaves too. Avoiding all of this is simple. Don't over water and hand pick them.

Harvest Time

Back to the most fun part! The harvest time! Make sure the plant is grown enough to spare it's delicious leaves at about 6-8 inches tall and cut off a few starting at the top. Make sure you handle the leaves very lightly because they will damage and blacken.

Storage and Preservation

Take your basil in a number of loose bunches and air dry them. But, our suggestion is to freeze them in a very interesting way you may not have thought of.

Take a little extra time and puree the basil in a blender adding water as needed, but leaving thick but still pourable.

Then pour out into an ice tray. Once they are fully frozen you can take them out and place in freezer bags or an airtight freezable container. When you

are ready to use in a sauce or pesto just pop them in the recipe—it's as simple as that.

Quick Pesto Recipe

1. $\frac{1}{4}$ cup your delicious home grown basil pesto.
2. One whole garlic head minced or just two tablespoons of minced garlic.
3. $\frac{1}{4}$ cup grated cheese
4. Pour in extra virgin olive oil while spinning in blender to a nice saucy consistency.

You can use pureed basil in any soup or sauce you like!

More Delicious Uses for Basil

Basil can be used for a multitude of spaghetti sauces, pizza and even meat and fish dishes because it marries really well with lemon, thyme as well as parsley and chives. You can really make some tasty recipes if you use the basil varieties that are actually flavored in lemon and lime.

These are great for stir fries and veggie casseroles! Thai Basil is a staple in their land and on their plates such as the 'Siam Queen' which will lend a highly authentic flavor to the above dishes and more.

And how about using beautiful basil vinegar as a salad dressing with the purple leaved variety? We meant the sky is the limit for this highly versatile herb.

Growing Guide for Chives

Overview

This is a perennial and produces tiny almost unnoticeable bulbs in lavender and pink blossoms. They are best in hardiness zones 3-9 and reach 18 inches high.

How to Grow

1. **Preparing the Soil:** Add aged compost to the soil into well drained soil.
2. **Planting:** Plant seedlings in the full sun of spring. If mulched, keep that away from the plant bases to prevent disease and promote circulation of air in that area. They need a lot of weeding because they don't do well around other plants.
3. **Space Needed:** Plant between 6-8 bunches of bulbs 5-8 inches apart. Then, every 3 years, separate clumps divide those at 4-6 bulbs each.
4. **Fertilizer:** Do not use heavily concentrated nitrogen.

Harvest Time!

1. With scissors, cut chives. Make sure you are cutting 2 inches above the soil.
2. Once it's flowered, prune the whole plant to remove spent flower stalks.

Chives are a 5,000 year old accompaniment to food. Colonists brought chives to America and probably from China and other parts of Asia where they are most heavily used.

Growing Guide To Oregano

Overview

Oregano is a perennial. Did you know that oregano is one of the only herbs that actually taste better in its dried form than fresh?

Hardiness:

That depends on the species and subspecies of the particular plant. Most are good up to zone 5 and will withstand a moderate freeze. If you live in a marginal area, then it's best to grow as an annual plant or alternatively you can container it for the winter indoors.

Soil:

The type of oregano that is used to cook is easy to grow. They are hardy enough to tolerate a large soil variety just keep it all well drained. It is a Mediterranean style herb and needs only a moderate water supply and grows in full sun.

Oregano is very easy to grow as long as it doesn't get too much moisture. If it does, then root rot will kill the whole plant. If you are in a high moisture

area, make sure you put them in raised flower beds and fill the land or containers with a lot of organic matter to provide much drainage.

Fertilizing:

Organic matter is the key here for proper drainage. Plants in a container are in need of more watering and fertilization than in-ground plants though. The suggested fertilization frequency is every 6-10 weeks during the season for growing. Use mulch or stone to keep the surface dry.

Harvest Time!

Once the plant reaches 8 inches in height it can be harvested. If you can get it just prior to blooming the flavor is nice and intense. If you harvest frequently you can insure a full plant. Cut back 6 inches in the mid fall so that you have a full enough plant to last through the winter.

Drying:

Advice from Mark Carter, owner of the *Carter House Restaurant 301 Eureka, California* would be to cut it and dry it so that it intensified and mellows the bitterness out of the flavor that it has when eaten fresh. After the dew of the morning you can cut it and hang it upside down in small enough bunches.

Or lay it on a screen in a place that is warm but dry. Wait until the last minute before you need to use them to chop them. The essential oils will stay preserved.

Cooking:

Less is more because of the strong taste. Add and taste as you go.

A Growing Guide To Thyme

Overview

There are many versions of thyme. Some range in color from white to pink and you'll even find magenta. They have small leaves and small flowers as well. *Mother of Thyme {Thymus Serpyllum}* is so hardy and fast growing that you could step on it and it would survive!

It also, like ivy will cover walls and such. *T Coccineus* makes sort of a mat type of growing pattern and yields red-purple flowers and will turn bronze in color in the fall. It has wood like and wiry branches. They emit a lemon smell and are good for hardiness zones 4.5.9.

How to Grow

1. Plant in full sun and in a dry soil with a gritty texture. They will seen outside in a bed which is prepared in the fall or the spring time. You can also start your seeds in flats indoors if you like.
2. Thyme bushes as long as they aren't variegated types will just see themselves without much help at all. You won't have to worry about not having enough through the winter if the old plants die.

You can propagate them by separating the root pieces or cutting them as well. If you live in the North you may cover them with the boughs of evergreen trees and protect them.

Harvesting Time!

You can harvest them when they start to flower. You can remove the tops and place them in a food dehydrator or dry them on trays. Once they are dry sufficiently, you must strip them from the stems.

After that, just store them in a cool, dry place until you're ready to use. You can do this all summer long but remember not to cut them back at all or not a lot in fall.

Uses for Thyme

The essential oils in thyme are called thymol and use as a cough suppressant. It is a digestive aide and an antiseptic. Thyme is great in soups, stews and stuffing as well as salad dressing, pizza and with eggs, poultry and fish dishes, YUM!

A Growing Guide for Rosemary

Overview

Rosemary grows in bushy like clumps with branch like stems. It gives off needle like leaves and smells perfumy and delicious. Its hardiness level is 8-9 for evergreen and 6-7 for perennial. In this zone you can grow the 'Arp' variety or grow it in containers indoors.

This herb is more than just for cooking. Its fragrant leaves have been used for sachets, oils, soaps and lotions. They can grow between 5-6 feet tall—like a human! This is really only outside. Indoors, it's more like 2-3 feet but still quite ample and bushy.

Planting Rosemary

1. Plant in gravely or gritty well drained soil in the full sun.
2. Buy from plants for the first grow because seedlings take forever!

Spacing:

- 2 feet apart is good or 4 feet for perennial.

Harvest Time!

This plant is so simple! Just harvest as needed all year long! Slide your thumb and index finger along the stems and you got it! If you want to freeze the stems you can and then just defrost and harvest the same way.

In Greece, men and women kept rosemary under their pillows to ward off nightmares and demons! Students wore wreaths on their heads to help them absorb what they were studying.

Growing Guide To Mint

Overview

Mint is a hardy plant with much vigor! It grows well in pots as well as in the ground and grows equally as well indoors.

How to Grow Mint

Growing mint indoors is a cinch. You need sand, perlite na peat mix in your soil. You can grow your mint in any container you wish, with or without soil as it can cultivate in just water.

But, let's do this the most common way in soil. This plant needs indirect light so an east exposure in spring and summer and west facing in winter and fall is best.

Make sure you store the plant in a 65-70 degree environment in the day time and a 55-60 degree temp in the night.

Want mint in the winter? Just take cuttings from 5 inches off the top and remove the bottom leaves. Replant in some water and keep in doors it will keep growing.

Keep your mint plant soil evenly moist. Test with finger for dryness and water accordingly.

Place a tray if water in pebbles or mist to keep humidified.

In midsummer you can move her outdoors but either way, you should rotate it every 4th day to have an even plant. This is because plants will bend to face the light and grow uneven.

Apply a fish emulsion or fertilization liquid and use. But, don't over fertilize because it will cause a loss of overall flavor.

Growing Guide to Dill

Overview

The word Dill comes from an Anglo-Saxon word *dylle or dille meaning to soothe or to lull*. It originates from the Mediterranean and Asia and has gas relieving properties.

It is a very short lived perennial that is actually treated as an annual. Its seeds are used for pickling and its leaves are used in fish dishes, soups and salads to name a few.

Growing Dill Indoors

Dill is simple and can be grown indoors and can be harvested in 6-8 weeks of growth it's an expedient yielder!

According to gardening expert Susan Patterson, you should plant dill no earlier than October and no later than early spring.

Plant the Seeds:

Plant the seeds $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{1}{4}$ inch deep in the ground. Keep in well draining soil that is rich in compost. You can add sand or perlite if it's not draining well. The optimal PH level is 6-7.5

Plant them in a planter 9 inches apart and it's OK to sow 4 inches apart then once the plant comes up—you can go back to 9 inches.

Give them Enough Light:

You can use fluorescent grow lights at 8 inches above the plants or sodium lights at a higher level than that if your home has nowhere that the plants can be reached by sun for at least 6 hours.

Use lights for 12 hours a day. Florescent are cheaper and most widely used by home growers.

Water and Feed:

Use half strength liquid fertilizer every 6 weeks with fish fertilization. Water well but not too much as dill is resistant to drought. Although it will be a better producer when watered.

Stake the Plants:

If you want it to stop at the standard variety of 36 inches, then you can plant '*Fern Leaf*' which is the dwarf variety which wil grow a mere 18 inches. If you like them bigger then stake the plant to prevent bending and drooping.

Harvest Time!

This will be ready in 6-8 weeks for harvest! Just as you see the flowering start the leaves with stop and it's time to cut! Make sure you trim the leaves from the base of the plant.

Cut the whole plant down and it should regrow in 8 weeks. If you have use for the seeds then follow this process. About 2-3 weeks after you see the blooms you can see the buds begin to get ripe and turn a tan color.

Hang the cut stalks upside down in a plastic bag. Poke holes in the bag around the head of the seed base and the seeds will fall into the bag.

Growing Guide for Chamomile

Overview

This herb is a perennial Chamomile is a flower herb that is said to calm the nerves of anyone drinking its tea. It's a cheerful herb with a lovely look of the sun in its yellow tiny blooms!

There are two types of this happy herb. Roman chamomile (*Chamaemelum nobile*) and German chamomile *Matricaria recutita*. The Roman one is the original chamomile. The German one is a variety and is grown to be used as the same properties.

The way to grow either of them is virtually the same. Roman Chamomile is also known as Russian or English Chamomile. This type grows like a mat on the ground. It has white flowers around a yellow center. The German one is a receding annual and grows upright.

How to Grow Chamomile

Grows with the similar conditions as the other.

Grows in Zones 3 and 9 very well.

Grow plant from either plants or seeds. The suggestion is plants rather than seeds.

Temperature:

As long as the plants are in dry cool soil they will grow in either part shade or full sun.

Fertilizer:

Do not over fertilize! These things grow like weeds and don't need any help after they are set. Just water when there has been too much drought and that's it! Otherwise you will get a tasteless flower.

Water:

If there is way too little water it may be attacked by aphids, mealybugs or thrips. Very rare though—they are known to be a pestless plant. Chamaemelum is often a companion plant to other plants in keeping pests away.

Growing Guide to Parsley

Overview

Parsley indoors or out is in a word, easy! It is also great looking for flower pots and comes in a variety frilly and curly shapes. The flat variety is known for flavor.

Growing Container Parsley

This herb wants 6-8 hours of sun a day in a south facing window if at all possible. Reposition it every 3 days so it grows evenly and not just toward the sun. if you don't get enough light then supplement that with fluorescent lighting.

Water:

Fill the part with good draining soil and a handful of sand if needed. Make sure you are keeping them well watered and not over watered. They are a simple plant to deal with.

Humidity:

This is not normally an issue. Keeping the plant in the kitchen around steam from cooking is a great idea. If you think the plant leaves look dry or brittle—you can mist it or keep it on a tray of moist pebbles and expose the tops of the pebbles and gets them to humidify the plant.

Grow from Seeds:

Parsley has a lengthy tap root. This makes it not so good for transplanting. So, instead, put the seeds on top of the soil covering it with ¼ inches of top soil.

Pinch Seedlings:

In three weeks you should get seedlings. If you get too many simply pinch them off with fingers, pulling damages the plant.

Thank You For Reading!